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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

ACCOUNTING FOR THE DIFFERENCE

THE FATE OF POLISH NOMENKLATURAS

SINCE 1989

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 1997		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1997 to 00-00-1997	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Accounting for the Difference. The Fate of Polish Nomenklaturas Since 1989				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 28	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

“Finality is not the language of politics ”

Benjamin Disraeli, Speech, House of Commons, Feb 28, 1859

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Disraeli's pronouncement is worth heeding. His dictum foreshadowed the 1993 Polish election results and was further confirmed by the 1995 victory of Aleksander Kwasniewski, a post-Communist, over Lech Walesa, the incumbent president and former Solidarity leader. Some observers depicted these electoral results as proof that the Communist menace still exists and could yet derail Polish democratization.

My paper will not analyze the 1995 elections in Poland *per se*. Instead, I will concentrate on a more limited question, i.e., the reasons for the continued presence of former *nomenklatura* members in government positions and whether such a presence is proof of backsliding in the transition to democracy. All countries that undergo a wrenching political transformation face a similar problem: where to find the expertise and manpower to replace the discredited or deposed elites that once ran the country. Poland has not been spared this dilemma. Yet, the absorption of the *nomenklaturas* into modernized government structures and into the economic life of the country appears to have been more successful and less socially divisive than in other Eastern European countries. What made the Polish case different?

In attempting to answer this question, I consider three *nomenklaturas*: economic, cultural, and political. For the purposes of this paper, success refers to continued employment or influence in a particular sphere of activity, as well as societal reactions to

those activities Under these criteria, the economic and cultural *nomenklaturas* experienced greater success than their political counterparts

I have identified four characteristics that I believe contributed to successful incorporation First, Poles never accepted the imposition of Communism and ideological fervor, even among party members, did not run very deep Second, travel, employment, and foreign currency policies of successive Communist governments unwittingly paved the way for competent members of the *nomenklatura* to remain in positions of power Third, the impact of the opposition as embodied by Solidarity and the Church, as well as a positive strain of nationalism, was felt by all segments of society and promoted a shared sense of purpose at the time of transition Fourth, the regime, Solidarity, and the Church agreed on a transition program that steered clear of widespread purges and lustration and concentrated instead on the process of change

While other Eastern European countries may have exhibited one or two of these characteristics, Poland displayed all of them simultaneously prior to the transition to democracy The presence of these factors, plus the strength of their manifestation, influenced both the quality and direction of the democratic transformation and contributed to the eventual "rehabilitation" of the *nomenklatura*

COMMUNISM'S LOST MASSES

Imagine, if you can, how perpetually discouraged the Polish Communist Party leadership must have been throughout its reign. As Jack Bielaszka and Włodzimierz Brus write in Poland. Genesis of a Revolution, for over thirty-five years (1945-1980) Poles steadfastly refused to recognize the Party's claims to political legitimacy Five major

political crises occurred between 1956 and 1980. Workers' rebellions managed to bring down two governments. Attempts to collectivize agriculture failed dismally, never reaching more than 11 percent of total arable land. After the 1956 upheavals, over 90 percent of collective farms dissolved themselves. The Party's repeated efforts to suppress and stifle the Catholic Church were deeply resented. Approximately 90 percent of Poles remained overwhelmingly and openly devout Catholics. Cultural institutions stubbornly pursued or promoted independent and outspoken views of "Polishness."

Communist governments were not unaware of popular sentiment. Starting with Gomulka, who attempted to develop a Polish path to socialism, continuing with Gierek, who tried to reconcile political dogma with technocratic innovation, and ending with General Jaruzelski, who sought to revitalize the Party and institute some economic reforms, successive Communist leaderships wrestled with persistent demands for change. Experiments to reform the economy consistently failed because no similar exercises were conducted in the political sphere.

It would be misleading, however, to say that economic issues were the primary cause of Communism's downfall. The upheavals that led to the rise of Solidarity in 1980 resulted from a widespread perception "that regarded Poland as being threatened in its very fabric, as a society and as a nation, above and beyond any problems rooted in specific policies of the regime" (Brumberg ix).

Mass rejection of Communist dogma does not mean that the Communist Party was an insignificant feature in Polish society. By 1980, Party membership totalled 3,131,700 members. Under Gierek's leadership, an aggressive recruitment campaign tilted the composition of the Party in favor of the working class. Workers in 1980 made up 46.2

percent of the membership, while white collar personnel accounted for only 33 percent. However, appointments to higher ranking positions in the party apparatus still demanded higher education and administrative experience, requirements that disadvantaged working class members. (Brumberg 21) Gierek's efforts to expand the party's base were not abandoned by his successors. Ivan Szelenyi noted in his study on the reproduction of elites in Russia and Eastern Europe that "the recruitment of upwardly mobile people from the working class, and in particular from the peasantry, remained very important until the very end of the socialist period" (Szelenyi 13).

The advent of Solidarity and the imposition of martial law led to an irreversible downturn in the party's fortunes. Approximately one million members, most of them workers, left the party between 1980-1984. Between 1978-1986, the proportion of working class members fell from 46 to 30 percent. Additionally, the party was graying fast. Members over the age of 50 constituted 36.3 percent of the party by 1986, versus only 17 percent in 1954. Only 2.2 percent of those aged between 18-29 belonged to the party. Professionals in nonmanagerial slots deserted in large numbers.

By 1987, there were only 2.1 million members in the Party. It is also estimated there were approximately 1.2 million managerial slots in Poland. The *nomenklatura* encumbered 900,000 of available managerial positions (Fowkes 168). Thus, by the time the Roundtable Accord was signed on April 5, 1989, both Solidarity and the Jaruzelski regime understood how difficult it would be to set up new government structures without using the *nomenklaturas*.

THOSE WELL-TRAVELLED POLES

In addition to being over-represented in managerial positions, the *nomenklatura* enjoyed many other privileges. Communist elites could count on jumping the queue on housing, getting better medical care, on sending their children to more prestigious schools, on being issued passports for overseas travel, on obtaining permission to hold foreign currency accounts, and on shopping at “dollar” stores. The last three privileges are particularly significant in the Polish case because these perquisites were available not just to the highest ranking members of the Party, but also to lower level *nomenklatura*.

A common phenomenon in Poland before the 1989 transition was the export of expertise to third world or developing countries. Professionals, such as mid-level managers, architects, engineers, doctors, and scientists could sign multiyear contracts for overseas positions. Typically, these jobs were arranged through organizations like “PolSERVICE”, a sort of headhunting agency. Poles working on legally sanctioned overseas contracts travelled on official passports and, more importantly, could legally hold foreign currency accounts.

While the majority of the positions were located in developing countries, the firms doing the hiring were often multinationals or international consortia. As a result numerous lower-level *nomenklatura* members were exposed, often for long periods of time, to management styles and practices that differed significantly from those used in state-controlled Communist enterprises.

Equally significant, perhaps, was the government’s rather liberal travel policy for average Poles who were not party members. Poles travelled often and extensively. Tourism to brotherly socialist countries was encouraged but destinations of choice were

countries where jobs could be obtained and foreign currency amassed. For most, the United States was the preferred option.

As a junior consular officer in Warsaw in the early 1980s, I remember being surprised at the very large number of Poles who managed to obtain passports and travel authorizations. Travelling overseas for the purpose of working illegally was a violation of Polish law. Officials were aware that extremely large numbers of travellers misrepresented the purpose of their trip and/or illegally overstayed their visas. Yet, passports were often reissued and there seemed to be little fear of repercussions from the authorities.

Unlike their *nomenklatura* counterparts who had official work contracts, tourists on "work vacations" often ended up in low paying positions that did not take advantage of previous job experience or qualifications. However, the net result was much the same. Foreign currency was accumulated and foreign language skills were developed or improved. More important, Poles who were not members of elites were also exposed to western-style management practices.

That Communist governments deliberately countenanced illegal employment overseas is evident in the policy that eventually allowed Poles unrestricted access to the PEKAO and PEWEX chains. PEKAO's sold imported Western goods for hard currency. PEWEX shops, on the other hand, specialized in "internal exports" - selling scarce Polish products to Polish citizens. Efforts to convince Poles to part with billions of dollars of foreign remittances had not been particularly successful because people distrusted the government and rightly feared their currency holdings could be frozen or confiscated. The shops were an attempt to ease perpetual hard currency shortages by coaxing foreign remittances and earnings into circulation and into the hands of the government.

While the hard currency shops were the visible manifestation of the regime's needs and seemed like a good solution to foreign shortfalls, the liberal travel policy had unintended long-term effects. I have already noted that, thanks to overseas employment opportunities, significant number of Poles were unwittingly educated in the rudiments of western-style economies. I have no statistical proof of this, but anecdotal evidence based on conversations with acquaintances and visa applicants leads me to believe that employment overseas did more than just expose Poles to efficient management practices. I repeatedly heard comments about the importance of competence and initiative in a free market economy. Understanding the complexities of successfully managing a business or enterprise made non-elite Poles with overseas experience less disposed to favor wholesale purges of the economic *nomenklatura*. Technocrats with managerial experience would be needed to run a market economy and pragmatism demanded that competent individuals be retained, provided they did not hinder democratization.

Szelenyi's study on elites confirms how the economic elites fared in Poland. In 1988, of people who were in economic *nomenklatura* positions, 56.6 percent came from the elite. 19.8 percent of the positions were filled by non-elite personnel. 23.6 percent retired. By 1993, those who had held economic *nomenklatura* positions in 1988 accounted for 43.9 percent of slots. The non-elite contingent had increased to 27.6 percent. 28.5 percent had retired. Perhaps even more significant, 50.7 percent of the new economic elites in 1993 traced their origins to the *nomenklatura*.

Szelenyi described the dynamics of outflow from the economic *nomenklatura* in Poland and Hungary as counterintuitive. "In Poland, almost 70 percent of the 1988 top economic managers were still in elite positions in 1993, only 24 percent of them went into

retirement. The better survival capacity of the former Polish economic nomenklatura is supported by inflow data as well. While exactly half of the new Polish economic elite was of the nomenklatura in 1988, in Hungary only one third of the new CEO's came from such a background. These results are particularly surprising since, during the epoch of late state socialism, it was generally assumed that the Hungarian economic management was better trained, more competent, and that political criteria played a lesser role in their selection than was true in Poland. It is also surprising that the Polish economy, where the nomenklatura was more successful in preserving its positions after 1989, produced better results than the Hungarian economy" (Szelenyi 11).

Szelenyi's study further notes that respondents were selected differently in different countries. Thus, "the Polish current economic elite sample is biased towards high officials in large firms, and they are more likely to be of nomenklatura background than the CEO's of small, private enterprises" (Szelenyi 11). I believe it would be useful to generate a statistical sample that correlates type and condition of overseas employment and management experience with current positions to determine what influence such experience had on outflows or inflows into the economic elite.

SOLIDARITY - MORE THAN A TRADE UNION

Resistance to Communism, exposure to the West, and rampant inefficiency and corruption undoubtedly contributed to the regime's downfall. Political miscalculation also played an important part. Solidarity was born of worker grievances over proposed price increases of meat and other food items. When the Government, without prior warning, announced price increases on July 1, 1980, strikes broke out in various parts of the

country. The upheavals brought into existence an opposition movement that became quantitatively and qualitatively different from its predecessors.

The government managed temporarily to control worker unrest by reaching wage increase agreements with individual plants and strictly controlling news coverage. Soon, however, the Committee for Social Defense (KSS/KOR) began to disseminate information about the work stoppages to the foreign press and to Western diplomats. As the strikes were not covered by the government-controlled press, the information collected by KOR became a primary source of news. (Note: KOR came into being in 1976 when 14 dissident intellectuals banded together to help workers arrested during the demonstrations. The group also kept tabs on the Government's behavior and issued reports periodically.)

On August 14, 1980, the Gdansk shipyards went on strike. The Gdansk work stoppages immediately elevated the protests to a much higher level. Gdansk shipyard workers had been brutalized during the 1970's upheavals and enjoyed enormous popular sympathy among the working class. When the Gdansk strike spread to other Baltic cities and to major industrial centers, it became obvious that events had assumed a political character.

Within a few days, the government came close to meeting the demands of the Gdansk workers. But other strikes were still unresolved. Lech Walesa, who had emerged as the shipyard workers' leader, realized the tactical advantage of banding together with other strikers. Walesa kept the stoppage going in order to incorporate additional conditions favored by the democratic opposition. Thus, a list of basic labor issues expanded to include, among others, freedom of speech and of the press, media access for all religious denominations, the right to strike and to organize freely, abolition of

privileges for the *nomenklatura*, selection of managerial personnel based on merit and qualifications, free Saturdays, and restoration of civil rights for those punished after the 1970 and 1976 upheavals

If the strikers' demands were now political in nature, their tactics had also evolved significantly. Strike leaders enforced strict discipline. Unlike previous strikes, there was neither violence nor vandalism. More significantly, there was no effort to negotiate concessions solely on behalf of non-Communists. Blue collar workers, professionals, managers, etc., were welcomed to join if they so desired. As negotiations between strikers and the Government began, Catholic intellectuals came out openly in support of the workers' demands. The alliance of workers and intelligentsia lent cohesion to the protests - an element that had been lacking in the 1956, 1968, and 1970 crises. The effective partnership between intelligentsia and workers was the first of its kind in Communist-ruled countries since the end of WWI. After arduous negotiations, the final text of the Gdansk Agreement was signed between Walesa and Premier Jagielski on August 31, 1980. The agreement ostensibly upheld the primacy of the Communist Party, with the new unions disclaiming any intention of assuming the role of a political party. Language notwithstanding, the Gdansk agreement had an immediate impact on domestic political reality.

Nicholas Andrews' history of Solidarity between 1980-1981 highlighted some of the practical consequences of the Gdansk Agreement. The establishment of interfactory strike committees around the country signified the emergence of an organized alternative to the Party. Closer ties had been forged between trade union leaders and Church leaders. The fusion of Church, intelligentsia, and workers pointed to the broad array of reforms

that had to be implemented and to the widespread desire for democratization. The Communist Party lost its claim to sole representation of the working class. Furthermore, the agreement fragmented the Party. Hard-liners sought to sabotage the concessions while moderates and liberalizers sought to implement its provisions. Party cleavages persisted throughout 1981. (Andrews 27-38)

On September 6, Kania replaced Gierek as First Secretary. The Party then embarked on a protracted renewal program. However, internecine disputes plus a dogged determination to preserve the Party's monopoly on political power meant no meaningful reforms materialized. Thus, most of the Agreement's twenty-one points were never implemented.

In addition to the worker-intelligentsia relationship, the Church-Solidarity nexus assumed increased importance during this period. While some have supposed that the interests of the Church and Solidarity converged perfectly, Andrews presents a slightly differing view of the Church-Solidarity relationship as it evolved in 1980-1981. When the strikes began, the Church offered the strikers moral and spiritual support. Solidarity and the Church shared certain values but differed on strategy. The Church advocated calm and caution in dealing with the regime. Under Cardinal Wyszyński's guidance, this go-slow approach had served the Church well in the past and had allowed it to advance and protect its own interests. Furthermore, the Church was concerned about possible Soviet intervention. Its overriding concern was preserving the sovereignty of Poland.

Some of the younger trade activists, on the other hand, were anxious to press their advantage and extract quick reforms from the regime. Additionally, Solidarity was growing by leaps and bounds and had become harder to organize and control. The

Church found it difficult to exert a restraining influence on the young union. The Church's task was complicated by its own internal differences. A number of clergy disagreed with the Primate's cautious approach. They were sympathetic to union demands and thought that the Party's disarray provided a good opportunity to obtain democratic concessions peacefully. (Andrews 65-76)

Throughout 1980-1981, Poland lurched from one crisis to another. In spite of wrenching instability, a constant feature of the period was the continued growth of Solidarity. At the first stage of the union's Congress on September 5-10, 1981, the organization totalled approximately 9.5 million members. Solidarity had made inroads in all segments of Polish society, including the armed forces and the Party. According to a survey of 701 of the 896 delegates who attended the Solidarity Congress, former party members totalled over 7 percent of delegates. Less than 10 percent of the delegates were still members of the Party while 9 percent still belonged to the Socialist Union of Polish Youth. The delegates were a young group. About 52 percent were below the ages of 33 and 30 percent were between the ages of 36-45. Skilled workers predominated, as did members who had been active in pre-Solidarity trade unions. (Andrews 196)

While the Congress had adopted a relatively clear program, it had also maladroitly issued a statement addressed to Eastern European and Soviet workers expressing support for "those who had decided to follow the difficult struggle for a free trade union movement." The statement caused a furious reaction by the Soviet Government which exerted pressure on the Polish regime to halt Solidarity's anti-Soviet campaign.

Between October 16-18, Kania was replaced as First Secretary, General Jaruzelski was appointed in his stead. In an attempt to regain control of the Party apparatus,

members who were also Solidarity adherents were given an ultimatum. They were told to choose between the Party and the union. The concern of the Party leadership was understandable. Approximately one third of Party members had joined Solidarity. Tensions and unrest continued to mount throughout the country. On Dec 13, 1981, Jaruzelski announced the imposition of martial law.

Although martial law brought to a temporary end the official existence of Solidarity, it did not end the union's challenge to the regime. The union was officially abolished on October 8, 1982 but resistance merely shifted underground.

KEEPERS OF THE FLAME: THE OPPOSITION ELITE

The Jaruzelski regime initially succeeded in enforcing tight control over the opposition. Its attempts to coopt resistance by creating new structures, modelled on classic Soviet-front organizations, failed to generate genuine support, however. A government sponsored, official trade union known as OPZZ was created to replace Solidarity but did not catch on. Indeed, the union did not prove as compliant as the regime had hoped. In 1988, OPZZ challenged the government's economic reform program and partially supported some of the strikes that took place that year.

The Church, meanwhile, emerged as the mediator between the regime and the opposition. The conciliatory stance of Primate Glemp, who had replaced Wyszynski, was often disregarded by members of the clergy, however. Church-state relations were characterized by cooperation at higher levels and conflict at the lower levels. Nonetheless, the Church played a useful role in trying to prevent violent upheavals. The regime's

decision to bring to trial the security officials accused of murdering a priest, Father Popieluszko, eased somewhat tensions between the Church and the government.

Looking at institutions or mechanisms that would have a significant impact on subsequent events, it is obvious that the most important development of the 1980's was the rise of an alternative political culture. "Opponents of the regime acted as if they existed in a free society, in a Polish version of a civil society. Even though many of the leaders of underground Solidarity were eventually rounded up by the regime, it was not possible to control the vast number of underground periodicals and newspapers that emerged. An alternative political culture, with its roots dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, was formed" (Weiner 40-41). Fowkes estimates that "dissident publishing houses published 400 journals a year, reaching three million people, 500 books a year appeared via the 'second circuit' of independent publishing." (Fowkes 178)

The regime's tolerance of underground publishing was recognition that it served as a safety valve. Better to have people writing about problems than doing something about them. The Minister of Culture admitted in 1987 that "as for the so-called 'second circuit' we do not particularly support it, but we also do not go out of our way to persecute it" (Fowkes 178).

The safety valve argument was cogent, but the sheer number of persons involved in supporting a civil society made an even more compelling case for turning a blind eye to the phenomenon. Zbigniew Bujak, a leading figure of underground Solidarity, estimated in 1985 that "50,000-70,000 Poles were involved in writing for and publishing the underground press and in organizing underground groups and protest actions and that another 200,000-250,000 provided logistical support for such activities. If one were to

add in those participating in independent theatrical performances or artistic exhibits, the self-education movement, independent youth movements, and independent social support organizations, the number was magnified several times " (Ramet 86)

Underground publications were used by large numbers of Poles, including members of the Party apparatus, to obtain accurate information about developments in Poland and elsewhere. One of the senior editors of *Tygodnik Mazowsze* remarked in 1987 that "we've been writing far more about developments in the Soviet Union than [is written] in the official media. People are reading *Tygodnik Mazowsze* to learn about Gorbachev's reforms " (Ramet 111). In order to compete with the underground press, some state publishing houses began printing previously banned books.

The continued strength of the underground opposition and the establishment of an alternative political culture cannot be attributed solely to the outlawing of Solidarity. It must also be understood in the context of the Polish intelligentsia. The intelligentsia had its roots in Polish gentry and subscribed strongly to its values. As a force that coalesced in the 19th century, when Poland no longer existed as a nation, the intelligentsia became the keeper of the flame. Not only were Polish traditional values to be preserved for posterity, but the notion of safeguarding Polish cultural identity became a central concern of this class. Because of Poland's peculiar historical circumstances, the intelligentsia was also associated with resistance and opposition to those forces that would destroy or dominate the country. Insofar as the Catholic church shared many of these concerns, the Church and the intelligentsia were natural allies. (Brumberg 54-57) Imposing martial law and driving the opposition underground provided the intelligentsia with a ready-made opportunity to expand on its customary role.

The idea of preserving Polish identity was imbued with what I call positive nationalism. A desire to find a "Polish solution" to problems also characterized some of the Party's actions. Gomulka's search for a Polish way to socialism may be explained as positive nationalism. Similarly, Jaruzelski's decision to impose martial law has been justified as an effort to avoid Soviet intervention in Poland, an act that could have led to widespread bloodshed. Thus, on the subject of preserving the essence of Polishness, the Party and the intelligentsia appear to have been closer than on any other issues.

Convergence of views on the need to safeguard Poland's national characteristics served the cultural *nomenklatura* well after the fall of Communism. Szelenyi points out that 61 percent of the 1988 cultural *nomenklatura* retained its positions in Poland, versus 56 percent in Hungary (Szelenyi 11). In his analysis, Szelenyi acknowledged he was unable to account for this discrepancy and noted that Hungary's press and cultural institutions had been thought to be more liberal than Poland's. While official press and cultural institutions may have been muzzled, the vibrancy and pervasiveness of underground institutions mitigated the shortcomings of official structures. Tolerance of the underground by the Party apparatus, plus the shared "nationalist" bias to which I alluded above, probably account for the population's higher rate of acceptance of the old cultural *nomenklatura*. By 1993 Poland's and Hungary's statistics were closer, with *nomenklatura* and other undefined officials comprising about 75 percent of the new cultural elites.

A LEAP OF FAITH: THE ROUNDTABLE ACCORD

"The situation in Poland in the 1980's was characterized by three main elements the continuing strength of the opposition, General Jaruzelski's own deep awareness of the weakness of his regime, and the problem of economic reform, which turned out to be insoluble without taking Solidarity into partnership " (Fowkes 177)

Labor strikes in 1988 provided palpable evidence that the regime was having an increasingly difficult time controlling the population's frustration or workers' reemerging militancy "They were a warning that with a short carrot and a broken stick social compliance might be impossible to maintain. Because consumption was the main, if not the only, source of legitimation the economic failure eroded governing capability .the transformation of the economic system called for a strong government capable of suppressing discontent and various group interests. .under political circumstances at home and in the Soviet Union, the option of overt oppression (or of another martial law) was not available .. without legitimacy and credibility of the authorities, the problem of structural impotence could not be solved " (Kaminski 201)

Having reached an impasse, the Jaruzelski regime held out the offer of roundtable discussions with Walesa and the Solidarity leadership Opposition on both sides had to be overcome before discussions could begin in February 1989 "There had since 1986 been fierce internal conflict between rival groupings within the opposing camps on the issue of compromise " (Fowkes 179) General Jaruzelski's offer, although supported by Premier Rakowski, was bitterly opposed by the official trade union leadership Only by threatening to resign did he obtain Party acquiescence to his proposal

On Solidarity's side, a schism pitted 'Fighting Solidarity', the more radical wing of the party, and the Polish Socialist Party, founded by KOR veterans, against Walesa's

faction, which was heavily influenced by the Church. Disagreement was resolved when the Solidarity Citizens Committee was established. This body included intellectuals and activists and served as Walesa's political advisory board. The Citizens Committee eventually functioned as a shadow cabinet, its fifteen commissions preparing programs of action. It also provided an institutional framework for conducting negotiations with the regime.

Roundtable discussions began in February 1989 and ended in April. The carefully crafted final document agreed on the creation of the post of President (a position to be filled by Jaruzelski) and a two-chamber legislature (with members to be chosen in democratic elections in June 1989). "The final communiqué of the roundtable negotiations contains three major parts, or standpoints: on political reforms, on socioeconomic policy and system reforms, and on trade union pluralism. In addition, eleven annexes covering a very wide range of various issue-areas discussed within the so-called sub-roundtables are an integral components of the Accords. The discussions between the government coalition and Solidarity opposition encompassed all domains of public life in Poland" (Kaminski 2002). In the June 1989 Parliamentary elections, Solidarity and opposition candidates won by a landslide. In August, the Mazowiecki government came into power - the first democratically elected government in Poland since the Communist takeover in 1945.

Perhaps more significant than the official language of the annexes was the decision to draw a "thick line under the past." In other words, there would be no purges or witch-hunts against former Party leaders and internal security officials. Timothy Garton Ash questioned Mazowiecki's decision to adopt as a model post-Franco Spain and to encourage liberal forgiveness. While a spirit of moderation may have been acceptable

when the Soviet Union still existed, was it the right decision after the disappearance of the Soviet threat? Was it not fitting and proper that those responsible for oppressing Poland for so long be called to account? (*New York Review of Books* 11)

For some Poles, retribution seemed the only answer. Yet, in terms of moving the process of democratization forward, the decision not to engage in widespread purges was logical. As I mentioned earlier, a moderate attitude towards the economic *nomenklatura* was essential. They constituted the largest reservoir of managerial experience in the country - a reservoir that had to be tapped. Moderate Solidarity leaders gambled that a market-oriented economy and the establishment of a democratic political system would help temper remaining Communist tendencies among the apparatchiks. Thus far, steady economic gains and liberalization plus adherence to democratic rules of play indicate that opting for a moderate course of action was a good decision.

The verdict on the political side is more mixed. Poland went from Communist rule to a democratic transition managed by the opposition. In 1995, the election of Aleksander Kwasniewski, a former Communist functionary, sparked fears that democratic gains would be reversed. Was Timothy Ash right? Would the 1995 elections results have been possible if the political *nomenklatura* had been purged during the transition?

// But
do
gains
never
reverse

EXORCISING PAST GHOSTS - THE POLITICAL LEGACY

Determining whether the Kwasniewski victory represents a nefarious turn for the worse is easier if we set aside the emotional issue of retribution and forgiveness. A more useful indicator of intentions would be to gauge government actions since 1995. Poland's continued single-minded obsession with NATO membership and, less stridently, with EU

membership attests to its determination to achieve full integration with the West. A return to Communist-style dogma or to a managed economy would be incompatible with these aspirations

Communist ideology, which never enjoyed support among Poles, has been soundly discredited. Although Poles express concern over current economic conditions, extensive polling data confirms solid commitment to democratic governance. Richard Rose analyzed the 1993-1994 New Democracies Barometer which tracks mass response to transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (*Political Quarterly* 14-28). The study tried to determine the impact of recent events on ex-Communists and non-Communists alike. The survey revealed convergence of views on several questions but also some unexpected divergences.

When asked to evaluate past Communist political regimes, 40 percent of ex-Communists approved versus 37 percent of the non-Communists. Statistics about the past economic system were also relatively close. 57 percent of ex-Communists approved, non-Communists agreed to the tune of 51 percent. Asked to evaluate the present political system, 71 percent of non-Communists expressed positive views versus 62 percent of ex-Communists. More non-Communists favored the current economic system (52 percent) than ex-Communists (40 percent). There was almost perfect concurrence on how families were faring economically. 63 percent of non-Communists thought they were doing worse, 62 percent of Ex-Communists agreed. Both ex-Communists (79 percent) and non-Communists (83 percent) believed they have greater freedom of expression.

Questions on the future of the political and economic systems again revealed broad agreement. 86 percent of non-Communists were optimistic about future political regimes

Ex-Communists were only slightly less optimistic; 81 percent expressed confidence. Concerning future economic systems, 73 percent of non-Communists were optimistic versus 64 percent of ex-Communists.

The survey on support for undemocratic alternatives should offer some comfort to those worried about the resurgency of Communism. A couple of minor surprises did emerge. 18 percent of non-Communists favored the return to Communist rule but only 17 percent of ex-Communists did. The difference is too small to be statistically significant, however. When asked whether they favored suspending Parliament, 25 percent of ex-Communists agreed. However, more non-Communists were in favor of suspending Parliament (30 percent).

In Rose's view, the survey reveals that ex-Communists resemble their fellow citizens in most of their political values. Support for the old political regime can be interpreted as political nostalgia, with age making a difference in commitment to a democratic government. In a country like Poland, middle-aged ex-Communists spent most of their adult lives confronting active opposition. Younger Poles, for example those aged between 18-30, grew up during the twilight years of the Party. Communism, they believe, has little relevance to their current lives or their future prospects.

Are the opinions expressed in surveys transferrable to the political arena? In other words, are political apparatchiks less prevalent than they were before? According to Szelenyi's findings, greatest turbulence has occurred in the political *nomenklatura*. In 1988, 27.5 percent of those occupying political *nomenklatura* positions came from the elite. 44 percent were non-elite and 28.1 percent retired. In 1993, new political elite members broke down as follows: 23.7 percent traced their origins to the *nomenklatura*.

33.3 were other officials and 43.0 were non-elite (Szelenyi 15-16). The percentages of non-elites in 1988 and 1993 are almost identical. The infusion of "other officials" points to upward mobility from rank-and-file.

Turmoil in the political *nomenklatura* can be attributed to the time disconnect between economic and political events. The transformation of Poland's political landscape and institutions was accomplished rather quickly, albeit there are still a number of problems that need to be resolved. Revamping the economy has proven more complex and time-consuming. Politicians who imposed shock therapy on the economy found, to their regret, that the beneficial effects of economic liberalization lagged behind the electoral cycles. Large numbers of Poles saw their standards of living plummet. Prospects of eventual improvement were too far out in the future to make current loss of living standards bearable. In the 1993 elections, successor parties of the Communist Party obtained an absolute majority and succeeded in forming a coalition government. The 1993 election results were a first warning shot to the political leadership that economic changes were occurring too rapidly for the population to absorb.

Kwasniewski's fate, and that of subsequent governments, will depend, to a very large degree, on making the pain associated with economic restructuring acceptable to the population. Criticizing the results of the 1993 or 1995 elections as proof that democratization is endangered or about to be reversed misses the point. What happened in Poland in 1995 is precisely what should happen in a democratically-run system. Electoral results reflected the public's view that the transition had gone awry. The democratic system was fine but economic policies had to be reevaluated. Addressing the

public's concerns is a leadership challenge, not necessarily a symptom of systemic
 cisintegration

THE ART OF KOMBINOWAC

Almost all discussions of Polish history eventually discuss the romantic fervor that animates Poles as a people and a nation. Romanticism is the glue that allowed Poles to hold on to the idea of cultural and historical identity and to resist the imposition of Communism. Having to live under a Communist system, however, meant Poles were obliged to temper their romanticism with a healthy dose of pragmatism. The topic of pragmatism and compromise has been discussed in the context of survival in Communist societies. But what about its effect on countries transitioning to democracy?

Surviving in a society characterized by shortages, corruption, and inefficiency is not easy. In response to the material shortcomings of everyday life, people have to spend an inordinate amount of time making the most ordinary things work. So it was for Poles. Poles became masters at the art of *kombinowac*. In addition to its obvious meaning, the root word has slightly unsavory connotations. In addition to being underwear (the influence of the French language is apparent in this meaning!), a *kombinacja* can be both a plan and a trick. A *kombinator* can be a trickster or a dodger.

Kombinowac, when used to survive and to describe what people had to do in order to pull it off successfully, was resented as wasteful, corrupting, and sometimes demeaning. Undoubtedly it was all of the above. But it was also something else. *Kombinowac* demanded establishing a complex and interlocking set of relationships with corresponding obligations and rights. Because of the way Communist society was structured,

kombinowac could not take place exclusively between non-Communists. Interaction with Communists was unavoidable. Every transaction or exchange required give-and-take as well as a hard-nosed practical approach. In a perverse way, *kombinowac* prepared Poles for functioning in a democracy, where ability to compromise is a necessary attribute.

The Roundtable Accord is an excellent example of pragmatism in action. The Communist Party was unable to pull the country out of crisis and could not have done so without Solidarity's help. During the negotiations, Solidarity could have tried to block Jaruzelski from becoming President. Purges, trials, or truth commissions could have been made a condition of the transition. Instead, extreme options were eschewed. While the Church's message of tolerance obviously carried weight, the practical considerations of making Poland functional once again *with the aid of former Communists* was considered more important than exacting retribution.

The "rehabilitation" of the *nomenklaturas* is a fascinating example of how conventional expectations about previous behavior and future responses can be overturned. Other Central European countries exhibited some of the characteristics I mentioned in my opening remarks, but not to the degree that Poland did. The intensity and simultaneity of traits influenced both the quality and direction of the democratic transition and made the Polish case unique in Eastern Europe.

Very impressive, thoughtful, attractive
coherent, & informative. Best paper in
the course &, in my view, clearly
publishable. Let's talk. Make sure
you make a copy for your advisor
and, while you have it, make one
for me as well.

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Defense Intelligence Agency Award

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